

# HOW TO USE SOCIAL MEDIA FOR MARKET RESEARCH

## A White Paper





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# How to Use Social Media for Market Research

## INTRODUCTION

Market researchers are often expected to pull together comprehensive analysis and data in niches they either have a limited knowledge of or that they have not worked in for some time. Couple this with the ever increasing demand on time, and you find an almost universal pain point for the market research industry.

Because social media has long been disregarded as trivial and unreliable, market researchers have continually dismissed it as a viable research tool, and rightly so. Anonymity, lack of validation and its early adoption by primarily self-selecting, tech-savvy users are all valid concerns. More recently, however, the increasing pressure for social networks to turn a profit is forcing the industry to focus more heavily on promoting quality content from consistently-trusted people.

While this shift in focus has not yet made social media a reliable source of primary research data, it is encouraging the publication of accurate, quality content by recognized authors and researchers. Therefore, unless you are a large consumer-based company that can derive some actionable data from likes and shares on Facebook, there is another reason why social media should be a key part of your tool kit.

This white paper lays out the case for the use of social media in market research and outlines the basic steps necessary in order to create a market researcher's social presence.

## HOW SOCIAL MEDIA IS CHANGING MARKET RESEARCH

According to Generator Research, the total number of global social networking users is projected to increase from 1.8 billion by the end of 2013 to 2.5 billion by 2017; therefore, it is safe to say that social networking is not going anywhere anytime soon.

Depending on your industry, social media can supplement your market research objectives and allow you to talk directly to researchers and research communities in a collective way that has not been possible before. Let's examine how social media is transforming the market research industry from the inside out:

- 1. Real-time pulse checking.** Social media allows for rapid thought sharing and opinion offering. You have the ability to quickly connect with trusted researchers and gain timely access to reliable market research information through networking. In addition, customer trends and attitudes are primed for quicker mapping with social media. You also have the ability to see the fluctuations in consumer attitudes with minimal turnaround time.

- 2. Refined engagement with your audience and colleagues.** Traditional marketing methods placed consumers in the role of the listener. It was a one-way communication reminiscent of parental lectures. Social media opens up the lines of communication. Now, marketers can actually engage in a discussion with their target audience. It is more about learning what they want instead of telling them what we think they want. Social platforms also allow for refined engagement with other professionals in your field. This greatly helps to promote thought leadership and information sharing.
- 3. Flexible procedures for obtaining customer feedback.** Social media provides a market researcher with the ability to survey an audience and constantly compile actual data in real time. NM Incite states that 58% of social media users say they write product reviews to protect others from bad experiences, and nearly 1-in-4 share negative experiences to punish companies. Social listening allows a researcher to continue to monitor what people are saying. This is particularly useful in reviewing and qualifying market research providers for potential engagement.
- 4. Refined segmentation opportunities.** For a market researcher, social segmentation is critical to developing proper user personas and advancing your understanding of customers' needs. With the ability to test multiple tactics and gather consumer-generated content, a market researcher is able to refine customer segments and expand their knowledge about them. Social media affords you the opportunity to communicate with each consumer segment.
- 5. Optimizing research budget and spending.** Social media creates opportunities to save money. Social platforms allow researchers to connect with one another and encourage the posting of quality, reliable information that can prove valuable to others in your field. In addition, in terms of conducting supplemental research, with the appropriate measuring tools and a focused approach, social media can offer viable, lower-cost alternatives to some traditionally expensive research methods.

## HOW CAN SOCIAL PLATFORMS HELP WITH MY RESEARCH AND HOW CAN I TRUST THEM?

Most people have some level of social presence, whether it is a basic LinkedIn profile “just for business purposes,” or a fully fledged blog with integrated Twitter, Google+ and Facebook accounts.

These networks offer different ways of connecting and communicating with other people in your industry, which can be extremely beneficial for your research purposes. More than this, they allow their users to share, like and discuss a variety of content. As social channels are becoming increasingly effective ways to communicate with different professionals, these platforms are connecting communities of people that may never have met in the real world, broadening and expanding the reach of many industries. Researchers now also have an

additional outlet for discovering the most credible market research providers in any particular vertical. The social web has spread wide enough that there are communities of experts in every field you can imagine, all gathering to discuss and share research-related material.

From the outset, social channels have been treated with skepticism within the research community. Initially, consisting of very narrow groups of primarily tech-savvy people, both Facebook and Twitter gained a reputation for being particularly trivial in terms of content. Add to this the invalidated, unfiltered and often anonymous nature of the content, and it is easy to understand why businesses could not see any value in these social platforms.

More recently, however, the social media industry has matured and is increasingly looking for ways to turn a profit. In order to accomplish this, they have had to find ways to reduce anonymity and increase the reliability of their content and users. In addition, certain sites, such as LinkedIn, have to maintain a certain level of credibility in order to brand themselves as a business network.

While this improvement in content quality has made it possible for the larger consumer brands to derive some actionable market research from follows, likes and shares, it has not yet reached a point where serious market researchers from more diverse industries can utilize the data for their reports. So, how can these researchers harness the power of social to enhance their market research effort?

The answer lies not in the research itself, but in the people engaging in social media platforms and the communities that are sprouting up around them.

## WHAT IS SOCIAL MEDIA AND HOW DOES IT WORK?

There are hundreds of social platforms on the Internet, and this number continues to grow. There are, however, four primary social channels that are particularly well established and useful to market researchers: LinkedIn, Twitter, Google+ and Facebook. While each of these has its own terminology and unique differences in functionality, they all have the same basic building blocks. While some networks have additional functions that prove valuable to researchers, such as Google+ Hangouts, it is most important to recognize the common functions and how each can be used to further your market research efforts.

### Profile

All social networks require you to set up a basic profile. This shows other users who you are and what interests you. Each platform requires slightly different levels of information to get started, and while it is possible to set up anonymous or fake identities, it is generally recommended that you do not. Your profile is equivalent to an identification card. It is the first and, in most cases, the only chance to persuade people to connect with you. So, it is important to map out the right information to have in your profile in order to ensure that you are appealing to your target audience.

If you are looking to use social media to enhance your research prowess, it is highly recommended that you take a professional approach to your profile in order to establish yourself as a reliable source in the market research industry. The more information you can give that adds credibility to your research status, the more likely it is that other professionals will share and comment on your projects. Each social platform has a somewhat different 'social' profile, so you should adapt your persona accordingly. For instance, LinkedIn is considered a business network, so professional courtesy in posts is generally the norm, whereas Facebook is considered much more personal (for friends and family), so taking a more casual tone can be expected.

### **Stream or Wall**

Each social platform has a primary stream, wall or feed that consist of a list of posts from people within your network. In this you will see both public posts (those that can be seen by any of the people you are connected to) and private ones (where you are a member of a selected group of people designated as recipients). In each service there are ways of filtering this so that you only see posts from specific groups and/or people, but we'll cover that later.

### **Pages**

In addition to individual accounts, Facebook, Google+ and LinkedIn allow companies to set up brand pages. These work in a similar fashion to personal accounts, but represent organizations as a whole. People can "like" or "circle" pages, but they do not "friend" them in the same way you do an individual. As a researcher, brand pages can be of interest if you are researching specific verticals, or even specific organizations, as this is where they will tell you what they are currently selling or working on. Company pages can also be useful to researchers in helping connect them with the appropriate professionals within certain organizations.

### **Lists and Circles**

Your friends and followers can be grouped into lists in order to better manage who you post to and what posts you see at any given time. This is particularly helpful if you do research across different subject areas, or if you use your accounts for more personal posts as well as professional. By grouping your connections, you can more effectively communicate in a particular vertical.

### **Communities and Groups**

Another way to connect and network with sets of like-minded professionals is to use the different social platforms' groups or communities function. If you join one of these, you can send posts to, and lead discussions with, an entire network of industry professionals without having to follow or friend every single one. These are also effective ways of locating general information or finding specific individuals who may be useful aids in your research efforts, which you can then friend individually.



## Hashtags

Hashtags started as a way for Twitter users to tag related posts. By placing a # in front of a word, it became possible for users to find public posts that related to a given subject. This concept has extended across many platforms, including Google+ and LinkedIn, making conducting searches for particular research topics easier and more efficient.

## ESTABLISHING YOURSELF ONLINE AS A RESEARCHER

### Which Channels Should I Use?

There are only so many hours in the day, so you need to decide which social channels can be most effectively and efficiently utilized for your particular research efforts. This is especially critical as new networks continue to enter the market at a steady pace. Your choices will largely depend on the specific areas of research you cover, but, generally, LinkedIn is probably a good start. Most professionals have LinkedIn accounts, and many share their expertise and interesting links on it. Below are some of the more popular social networks to consider for market research usage.

### LinkedIn

Of all the social platforms, LinkedIn is likely the most relevant, as it was designed to closely reflect the growing needs of the business world. This particular social network is geared more towards professionals and companies interested in conducting market research in the B2B market. With the addition of university pages, there are signs that the platform is planning on integrating the more social aspects inherent to Facebook, Twitter, and Google+.

Because it is a niche network, researchers should closely monitor and engage in relevant discussion groups on LinkedIn to gain valuable information from other industry professionals as well as to connect with other market researchers in order to exchange ideas and best practices.

Some of the more popular Market Research Discussion Groups are: Quirks, Market Research Professionals, Next Gen Market Research (NGMR), Market Research and The Insight Innovation Forum.

### Twitter

Twitter is a fast-paced social platform that allows for immediate dispersion of information to high volumes of individuals, taking the concept of micro-blogging to global proportions. According to eBiz, Twitter is the 9th most visited website on the Internet, and with around 58 million tweets per day and 9,100 tweets per second, it has become a social media data haven. According to Statistic Brain, it is expected to garner around \$400 million in advertising revenue by the close of 2013.



Twitter provides market researchers with a platform to gather massive amounts of information from companies and other industry professionals. The Favorite and Retweet functions then encourage you to tag relevant information for later review and to repost the information for your own network of followers. Twitter's immediacy also allows researchers to build and quickly access a wide network of professionals for questioning, offering a valuable on-the-go troubleshooting nature.

## Google+

Google+ is becoming increasingly important and, currently, seems to be positioned somewhere between the business approach of LinkedIn and the more 'social' feel of Facebook. According to Business Insider, there are 359 million active users on Google+, which is a 33 percent increase from June 2012, forcing its way into the discussion of social networks that corporations must add to their integrated marketing strategy.

In terms of research, this platform is becoming increasingly important because of its connection to other Google platforms, including Google search. In addition, colleagues and connections can be organized into circles, segmented lists broken down by user-defined characteristics. As a market researcher, it is critical to take advantage of the circles capability to finely segment lists of credible research professionals in each vertical. Questions and posts can be shared exclusively with individual circles, communities or the public. A Google+ research strategy has the potential to be dynamic, multifaceted and widespread given the growth rate and ongoing development of the network.

## Facebook

Facebook may be a better bet if you are primarily focused on researching consumer brands and social trends. This platform is much more biased towards the 'social' aspect of social media and, as such, has a massive presence there. While Google+ has the edge in terms of search and online integration, Facebook also has powerful search capabilities and is tied into Microsoft's Bing services.

According to Facebook, there are over 1.19 billion active monthly users of the social network across the globe, which is a 20 percent increase from 2012. The landscape is monstrously large, and it is incumbent on brands to understand how to communicate using it. Because the network of individuals on Facebook is continuing to climb, market researchers must take note of the growing opportunity to connect with industry professionals and the increasing ability to distinguish credible and reliable market research on each platform.

It is also worth looking at some of the other social channels on the web if you are in a very specific niche. The social landscape is continuing to fragment with platforms such as Tumblr, YouTube and Vine. If one of these is more aligned with your research efforts, then try utilizing them as well.

## GETTING STARTED

Once you have identified the most viable social platforms for your specific research efforts, you are ready to begin utilizing them. The first step is to [create your profile](#), and as we discussed earlier, it is imperative that you use this profile to establish your credentials. How much or how little you share is up to you. However, keep in mind that if your goal is to find the highest quality research via the most reliable individuals and organizations, you must establish your credibility as a researcher. Otherwise, it will become difficult to meaningfully engage with the quality of connections that you desire.

Despite the hype concerning privacy, there are numerous ways within each network to keep your profile at a level of sharing with which you are comfortable. Having said this, if you are serious about networking with other professionals and getting feedback on research topics, you need to share at least enough about yourself that you will be taken seriously by your networks. Essentially, you need to treat your online interactions in a similar way to physical ones. In order to connect with interesting and informed people, it is important to present yourself in a credible way. Once you have created a professional and intriguing profile, you must then begin establishing a solid following within your field.

## CREATING A FOLLOWING IN YOUR FIELD OF RESEARCH

After establishing your profiles and research credentials on these social platforms, the next step is to start building up your networks. In each of your chosen platforms, start by connecting with people you know, such as family, friends or colleagues. Make sure you categorize them appropriately so that you only post relevant content to their feed.

Start slowly and review the profile and posts of each person before you connect to them. It is very common for people new to social media to feel the urge to connect with every person who sends them a request. Avoid this. Only connect with people who are pertinent to you and your research goals. In addition, particularly on Google+, it is common for people to share their circles of friends (often containing tens or hundreds of people they think are worth circling). Avoid these as well. This is a very easy way to clutter up your network with people that either post irrelevant content or do not post at all.

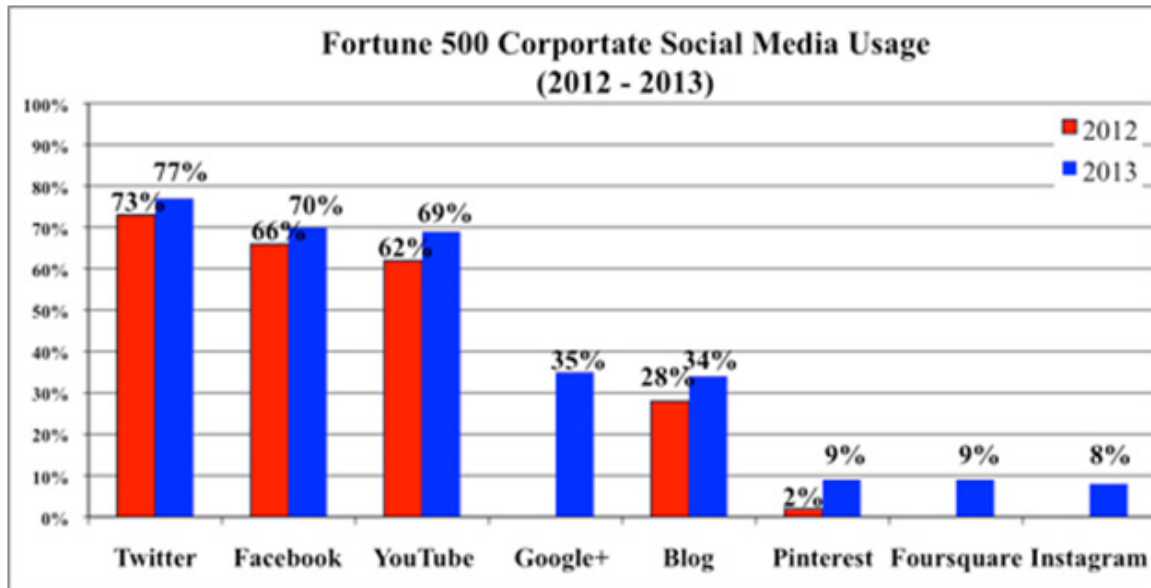
Researchers should also take advantage of the search options available on each platform to begin locating and connecting with other research professionals, market research providers and different companies. An annual report from University of Massachusetts Dartmouth evaluating the social media activity of Fortune Magazine's Fortune 500 list found that 77 percent of this year's Fortune 500 companies maintain active Twitter accounts, while 70 percent have Facebook pages and 69 percent have YouTube accounts. This was a four percent increase since 2012. In fact, eight of the top 10 Fortune 500 companies maintain a Twitter presence, and nine have active Facebook pages and YouTube accounts. Clearly, your options for viable connections are abundant.

Interestingly enough, the Fortune 500 company leading with the most Twitter followers and Facebook fans is new to the Fortune 500 list. Debuting at 482 this year, Facebook has over 8.5 million Twitter followers and more than 92 million Facebook Fans.

Corporation	2013 Twitter Followers
Facebook	8,629,741
Google	5,965,743
Starbucks	3,813,472
Whole Foods Market	3,381,926
Walt Disney	1,757,871
JetBlue Airways	1,732,293
Southwest Airlines	1,500,140

Corporation	2013 Facebook Fans
Facebook	92,271,077
Coca-Cola	66,875,169
Walt Disney	44,183,582
Starbucks	34,547,696
WalMart	29,090,933
Target	21,854,546

While Twitter, Facebook and YouTube still garner the most activity from the Fortune 500 set, many Fortune 500 companies are active on Pinterest, Google+, Instagram and Foursquare as well. The study revealed that 35 percent of Fortune 500 companies had active Google+ accounts, while 19 percent had non-active Google+ accounts. Forty-four of the Fortune 500 companies are on Instagram, including Ford, AT&T, Avon and Home Depot. Likewise, there are also 44 Fortune 500 companies on Foursquare, including Walmart, Target, Walgreens and Lowe's.




## FINDING RESEARCHERS, MARKET RESEARCH COMMUNITIES & INFORMATION

As you begin searching for individuals and communities to connect with, you will find several tools to be exceptionally helpful. It is important to understand how to utilize these tools to seek out the most credible and engaged members in order to most effectively benefit your research efforts. One of the most effective tools is the [groups and communities](#) features available on the different platforms.


Google+, for instance, offers Google+ Communities. These industry-specific communities allow you to find and engage with a large number of people who share a common interest. However, arguably the most useful feature of this platform is the searchable categories feature. This search option allows researchers to browse predetermined categories for already well-established groups. In addition, Google+ pre-recommends relevant communities based on your profile and associated groups and pages.

LinkedIn and Facebook utilize a similar function with their Groups feature, where individuals can search for different groups via keywords. You can also view similar results for each group listed. In addition, both platforms host “open” and “closed” groups. Open groups are



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available for anyone to join, whereas closed groups require approval before acceptance. The closed group feature is a particularly viable tool for researchers as members of the group are already prescreened.

Once you have found and connected with these individuals and communities, you can begin collecting valuable and useful information. As a market researcher, having extremely large amounts of data at your disposal is a good problem to have. The more data available to you, the better positioned you are to acquire the best information (from the best sources), make precise insights and draw comprehensive conclusions. By using social media, researchers are now able to create and access entirely unique collections of information promoted by preselected research individuals and market research providers.

## CORPORATE CASE STUDIES

Now that you know the benefits that social media can provide for market researchers, it helps to understand how established corporations have effectively utilized social media for market research purposes.

### LEGO CLICK

LEGO is a generational brand name that is well known in every household. They have used sophisticated consumer segmentation to break down their target market on a granular level, their core target audience being a young boy. Lego further segmented their customer base into the following six groups:

- Lead Users
- 1:1 Community
- Connected Community
- Active Households
- Covered Households
- All Households

In an effort to crowd source new product development, LEGO launched their social media campaign LEGO Click in 2009. Lego Click is a community that brought creative industry professionals together to develop new product ideas for the company's target market. Ideas could be submitted through community posting, or via Facebook and Twitter. On Twitter, by using the hashtag #legoclick, users could pitch their new ideas in an organized way.

This social think tank strategy is one of the ways to take advantage of the capabilities inherent to social media. It is an effective way to utilize talented innovators who are seeking any opportunity to share new ideas. For a company, it is important to leverage any expertise possible. Social media is well positioned to do just that, and Lego shows us how to successfully and strategically carry it out.

## ETSY

Etsy is an online marketplace revolved around the buying and selling of handmade products. Since its launch in 2005, it has grown to over 300,000 sellers and continually growing at a steady pace. Its first foray into social media was via Twitter. Taking a multi-faceted approach, Etsy sought to test the social network's capabilities to enhance customer relationship management and grow seller communities.

Twitter helped the Etsy community through the following:

- Alerted potential customers of new or featured products from sellers.
- Offered a channel for the exchange of ideas and suggestions to improve or streamline the creative process.
- Increased the social media reach for sellers in the community. This was done via retweets. It also underlined the importance of social media for the sellers, who look to broadcast their personal branding to the largest audience possible.
- Streamlined customer service and shortened response times. The rapid movement of a Twitter timeline garners many questions that are expected to be answered. This can supplement customer service, but should not entirely replace traditional customer service methods.
- Encouraged sellers to pose questions to followers and collect feedback, creating a social media focus group. Through ad-hoc surveys, a market researcher can obtain rich data in a short amount of time using social media.

## CLOROX GREEN WORKS

In 2010, Clorox ran another successful and exemplary social media campaign to market its new Green Works brand, a line of environmentally safe cleaning products. Clorox developed their target audience, females between the ages of 25 and 34, and began using many of the aforementioned social networking techniques that we have discussed. By searching for relevant keywords, such as "clean" and "green," Clorox targeted individuals on Facebook who had mentioned these keywords in their profiles. So, by networking and engaging with the right audience, Clorox was able to increase Facebook users' "intent to purchase" the Green Works detergent by 7%, according to a study conducted by Nielsen. In this instance, not only does Clorox's usage of social media exemplify the power of successfully networking with relevant individuals, but it also proves the importance of tailoring your profile to your interests and verticals.

## CONCLUSION

Social media is maturing and, in order to become profitable, has had to find both direct and indirect ways to validate the quality of the content and the people who use it. Social media is no longer a medium to discount, but rather a data collection platform used to make smarter business decisions on how you market your products and services and to more effectively locate specified material through networking with other industry professionals.

### Benefits Of Market Research Using Social Media

- Access to vast, worldwide networks of researchers in your field.
- Ability to find people researching in very narrow verticals.
- Speed with which you can communicate with communities and people.
- People like to share via social networks.
- Find the reports and research that are being talked about.
- Helps you get up to speed on the latest research in a given field even if it is new to you.

### Things To Avoid On Social Media

- Do not over post; otherwise, your information loses value.
- Stay professional and respectful.
- Display genuine interest in content posted by others in your communities; do not expect to get information from individuals you have not engaged with.

As more research companies, researchers and scientists go online and share their findings, the easier it becomes to locate the highest quality research in even the smallest and narrowest fields of study. And, with social media continually evolving and becoming more useful in the market research industry, the possibilities for community engagement and information sharing will only continue to grow.

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